

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

grace to persevere) was his friend and companion, Francesco di Messer Vanni Malavolti, the son of one of the most influential of the great Sienese nobles.

¹¹ I was then about twenty-five years old," writes
Francesco,
" not a little fiery and daring by reason of my
kindred and my
birth, well furnished with temporal goods, and,
impelled by my
still youthful age, I was living lasciviously and
unrestrainedly in
the wretched delights of the world and the flesh, as
though I were
never to die, recklessly pursuing my inordinate lusts
with all my
power. But it chanced that, as I had conversation
and fellowship
with many like me in age and birth, among my
other dear and
beloved companions, there was a noble youth of
Siena called Neri
di Landoccio di Messer Neri de' Pagliaresi, with
whom I spent
much of my time, both because he was very virtuous
and pleasant,
and because he was an excellent composer of
beautiful poems, in
which at that time I took the greatest delight.
This Neri, after
we had been friends for a long while, had heard often
(without my
knowledge) of the fame of that glorious virgin
Catherine, and
had even spoken to her, whereby he had become
wondrously
changed and made another man. Pitying
me because of
the lascivious life I led, and desiring the
salvation of my
soul rather than of my body, he many times
besought me to
go with him to speak with the said virgin
Catherine. But I,
caring little for these words and prayers, nay,
rather deriding
them, for a long time would not in the least consent
to his will;

but at length, constrained by his prayers, and
unwilling to distress
him because of the bond of singular love by which he
was bound
to me, I told him that I was ready to satisfy his
desire ; albeit, in
my inmost heart, I was not going thither from any
devotion, but
rather with contempt, and intending, if she preached
to me about
the spirit and especially about confession, to answer
her in such
wise that she would never speak to me any more.
And so, with
this intention, I prepared to go to her. But, when
we both came
to the glorious virgin, no sooner had I seen her face
than a
terrible fear entered me, with so great a trembling
that I almost
fainted ; and, albeit (as I said) I had no thought or
intention of